

# **Social Capital Decreases Risk of Hunger**

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# What is Social Capital?

**Defined by Putnam as the “features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society.”**

**The “glue” of society. The web of relationships that gives us a sense of connection, belonging, and community.**

**The level of connectedness, involvement, and trustworthiness among people that allows society to function.**



**Several studies have found significant associations between social capital and positive health indicators and decreased crime rates.**

**Research on food insecurity focuses on individual or household; limited research on community factors affecting household's ability to access food.**

**Yet no other research has examined the potential association between social capital and household food security.**

# Study Goals

1. Measure and analyze social capital at the household and community levels,
2. Examine potential associations between social capital and food security,
3. Explore the dynamics by which households with high social capital may be more food secure.



# Methods

**Interviews were conducted in 330 randomly selected low-income households (below 185% of poverty) from Hartford, Connecticut.**

**Respondents were each paid \$5 for their participation.**

**Background on Hartford.**

**Household food security and hunger were measured using the USDA 18-item Food Security Module.**

**Social capital was measured using a 7-item Likert scale based on an instrument used by Sampson, Raudenbush and Earls.**

# **Social Capital Measure**

**Examples of questions from social capital scale:**

**“People in this neighborhood can be trusted.”**

**“People around here are willing to help their neighbors.”**

**“This is a close-knit neighborhood where people generally know one another.”**

**Additional questions: How long have you lived in Hartford? How long have you lived in your apartment? Is anyone in your family a member of any social or civic organizations such as the PTA, church?**

**To create aggregated community-level social capital scores, the mean household-level social capital score for each neighborhood was used.**

# Results

**Over half of respondents (58%) had low social capital.**

**Over two-thirds of respondents (69%) reported that no one in their household was a member of any social or civic organizations.**

**Most hhs have lived in Hartford a long time (median time 20 years), but move frequently (median time in apt 2 years). 58% have lived in apartment for 2 years or less.**

**Consistent with our hypotheses, social capital is significantly associated with household food security. Community-level social capital and the percent of households experiencing hunger by neighborhood are strongly negatively correlated ( $r = -.764$ ,  $P < .01$ ).**

# **Social Capital: Bivariate Results**

**Having high social capital is significantly associated with:**

**Being food secure ( $p=.03$ ),**

**Being a member of an organization ( $p=.00$ ),**

**Not owning a home, but longer length of time in home ( $p=.01$ ),**

**Having an elderly member in household ( $p=.00$ ),**

**Not owning a car, but being able to borrow a car ( $p=.02$ ), and**

**Having income above poverty ( $p=.03$ ).**

**Social capital is not associated with education or employment status of adult household members.**

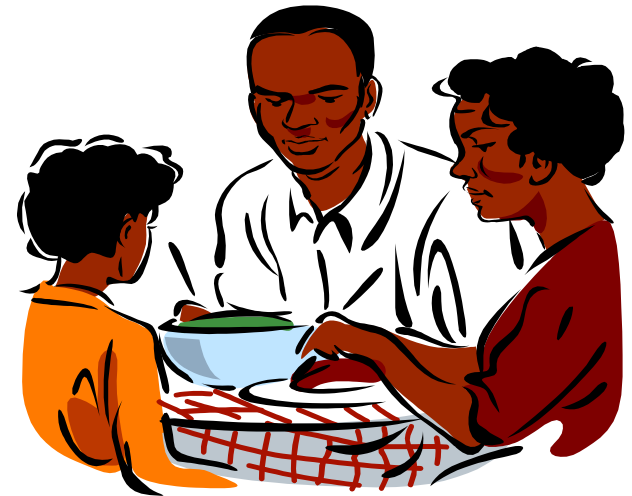
# **Logistic Regression Model**

## **Predicting Odds of Hunger**

**Households with high social capital are significantly less likely to experience hunger ( $p=.02$ ), when controlling for income, education, employment and marital status of adult household members.**

**Households that live in a neighborhood with high social capital are almost half as likely to experience hunger (Odds Ratio = 0.52,  $P= .01$ ) as households living in a neighborhood with low social capital, independent of household socio-economic status.**

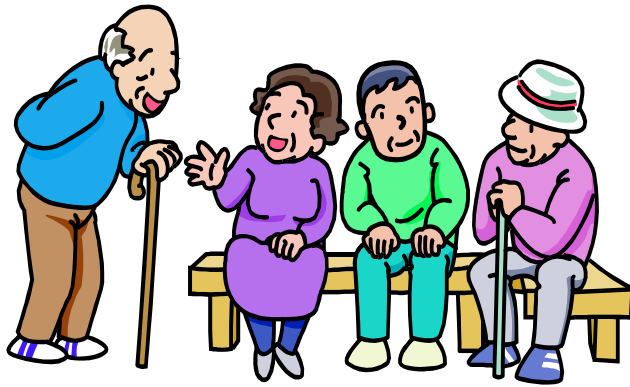
# Multivariate Results



**Being socially connected is not just a function of money.**

**In the regression models, social capital is significant at the household and community levels, regardless of household income, education, employment status and marital status of adult members.**

**Social capital can make a big difference in whether a household has enough food to avoid hunger.**



# Results

**Households with an elderly member are over 2 1/2 times as likely to have high social capital (Odds Ratio = 2.75,  $P < .01$ ) than are non-elderly households, after controlling for socioeconomic status.**

**Hartford households, particularly Hispanic households, tend to be extremely transient. Because they tend to move frequently, they tend not to be involved with organizations, which in turn makes them less socially connected.**

# Results

**In this study, trust is less important than reciprocity (being able to borrow money, food, or a car) as a factor influencing food security.**

**For households with limited resources, reciprocity can translate into tangible resources.**



# **Implications for Nutrition Education**

**These findings provide encouraging new avenues for preventing and reducing food insecurity.**

**More attention is needed to encourage young people and Hispanic households to join organizations or start new ones that reflect their needs and lifestyles.**

**In addition to focusing on the amount of food available to a household, it is also important to consider creative ways of supporting interpersonal relationships and strengthening the communities in which people live.**

**The root of hunger often is not just lack of money, but also lack of social networks and support included in social capital.**

**We need to provide conditions where neighbors can build social capital.**

- **Mentoring programs**
- **Micro credit organizations**
- **Parenting classes and support groups**
- **Safe parks**
- **Community centers**
- **Home ownership programs**



# **How you can build social capital**

- **Organize a neighborhood litter pick up**
- **Don't gossip**
- **Attend a PTA or town meeting**
- **Organize, coach, or participate in a sports league**
- **Support your local merchants**
- **Cut TV time in your house**
- **Host a block party or open house**
- **Stop and talk with your neighbors in the supermarket**
- **Read your local newspaper**
- **Register to vote and vote**

# Examples of Social Capital Projects

- **People Empowering People project in Hartford, CT**
- **Neighbors in Minneapolis created “community credit” system**
- **Community-led annual Talent Show in Stockton, CA**
- **Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative in Boston, MA**



# **Social Capital Websites**

**Better Together: The social capital website sponsored by  
the Saguaro Seminar at Harvard University**

**<http://www.bettertogether.org>**

**Civic Practices Network: Good definitions and examples  
of social capital**

**<http://www.cpn.org>**

**Research funded by the Hartford Foundation for  
Public Giving.**